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## For Children and Change: Judith Meyers' Compelling Work

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Shortly after the Charlottesville, Virginia, riots, Guilford resident Judith Meyers, as chairman of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy (CCP), joined with her colleagues to send a compelling message.

“We believe that all ethical people in our society ought to reject hatred in all forms and that there is no moral equivalency between neo-Nazis and white supremacists on the one hand and those protesting against hate on the other,” CCP’s message read, in part. “[W]e believe that philanthropy has an obligation to recognize this threat and speak to it directly. Therefore, we stand allied with our colleagues to denounce hatred, bigotry, and white supremacy in our communities, our state, and our country.”

Judith says CCP is also taking its message to the next level.

“We’ve just created a committee through CCP on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We see that as a role for philanthropy; speaking out on those founding values,” she says.

It’s not the first time Judith has been at the forefront of a Connecticut organization responding to paradigm-shifting events. Following the horrific events at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Judith, in her role as president and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI), worked with a team led by former state senator Danté Bartolomeo (D-13), with results including the formation of Connecticut's Behavioral Health Plan for Children (learn more [here](#) from [www.plan4children.org](http://www.plan4children.org)). Bartolomeo led efforts to pass General Assembly Public Act 13-178 which called for the State of CT (DCF) to develop a comprehensive mental health plan for children. Judith co-chaired the Advisory Committee and led efforts to develop the plan for DCF.

A clinical and community psychologist of 30 years, Judith signed on to lead CHDI 18 years ago. Thanks in part to work such as that undertaken by CHDI, the issue of building awareness and support systems to address children’s mental health has made great gains.

“Thirty years ago, there wasn’t much awareness that the needs of children were separate from adults,” says Judith. “Children were often seen as little adults. States didn’t have children’s mental health departments.”

In the 1980s, early in her career, Judith worked with the state as it began to address needs specific to children’s mental health. Through CHDI, she has worked to bring those in need more access to guidance and assistance.

“Most of our work is at the state level. We do a lot on policy and systems change, working behind the scenes,” says Judith.

CHDI also works to help deliver news and training for best practices to help those working with children—including parents, pediatricians, health care providers, child care providers, and educators—recognize potential issues early on, so that help can begin as soon as possible.

“A lot of it is around promoting healthy development,” says Judith. “A fair amount focuses on developmental health and primary care. The reason that pediatricians are so important is that’s the one place families go for well child visits, so some of our work is to give them the tools to screen and identify problems early on.”

With a few standardized questions, pediatricians can help screen for numerous issues, including recognizing maternal depression, early signs of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and trauma that could lead to the need for mental health care.

Currently, CHDI is working to raise awareness and develop early prevention screening tools to help avoid complications related to obesity, hypertension (high blood pressure), Type 2 diabetes, and other health problems plaguing a growing number of today’s very young, many of which can also lead to future mental health issues, says Judith.

In the state’s schools, CHDI is working on a program to train staff recognize children who may be acting out due to mental health problems, to help divert them from being referred to court, and instead get them the professional attention they may need. The program is waiting for funding.

“In many cases, it’s much more effective to get the schools involved. Rather than dialing 911 for police, they can call for emergency psychiatric response. We can train the schools on the behaviors to help to detect them,” Judith explains.

Judith says it’s rewarding to help guide cutting edge improvements in child health care services and drive mental health systems innovations. On Sept. 30, she’ll transition her president/CEO role with CHDI over to the current vice president, Jeff Vanderploeg. Judith will continue serving as president and CEO of the Children’s Fund of Connecticut, CHDI’s parent organization and the supporting organization of Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, through Sept. 30, 2018.

Judith also continues on as a senior fellow with CHDI. She’ll also continue her faculty appointments at Yale Child Study Center and UConn School of Medicine. Additionally, she will continue to serve on the board of CCP.

By working with staff, a supportive board and partnering organizations and individuals, Judith says CHDI and the Children’s Fund have made a difference by “bridging the worlds of research, policy, and practice.”

Judith and her husband, Richard Hersh, moved to Guilford a year ago from North Haven, attracted here by “the beauty of the shoreline and the beauty of the community,” says Judith.

While she will be busy during the coming year, as she begins to transition away from some of her work, “I may be able to get more involved in the community, and use my experience in different ways,” she says.

A lover of theater, Judith is also on the board of the Hartford Stage Company. In addition, she’s involved with the Greater New Haven United Way, serving on the Community Impact Cabinet, which reaches out to the shoreline area.

While she may be a new face in town, Judith will long be recognized as one of the state’s most accomplished and involved professionals in her field. Current CHDI board chair Margaret Grey says Judith is a “knowledge-driven change-maker for children’s health and mental health in

Connecticut.”

“She has helped build stronger and more effective health and mental health systems that result in better outcomes for all children in Connecticut, especially the underserved,” says Gray.